



News

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State Land Board urges action on hazardous vessels

New workgroup will propose a statewide program to address impacts of abandoned and derelict vessels on public waterways, public school funding

SALEM, Ore. – The State Land Board is urging continued action to address the impacts of abandoned and derelict vessels on public waterways and public schools.

Abandoned and derelict vessels seriously threaten waterway health and safety, creating both environmental and navigational hazards. For years, the Department of State Lands has worked with state, federal, and local partners to remove the most hazardous vessels.

But lack of a statewide abandoned and derelict vessel (ADV) program with dedicated funding has resulted in the Common School Fund spending millions removing vessels, while hundreds more pile up in public waterways.

The Land Board on Tuesday created an Abandoned and Derelict Vessel Program Workgroup to propose a comprehensive ADV program for Oregon, including identifying funding needs and potential sources. Read [the agenda item](#), which includes support letters from each member of the Land Board, or [watch the meeting video](#).

Cleanups Connected to School Funding

The Land Board oversees school lands and the Common School Fund, as well as Oregon's publicly owned waterways. Revenue from waterway leases, easements, and other paid uses covers most waterway expenses. But ADV cleanups come with big price tags that far exceed revenue – so the Common School Fund and Oregon schoolkids end up footing the bill.

Since 2017, the Common School Fund has spent more than \$18 million removing ADVs from public waterways. Recent costs include \$35,000 for removal of a sunken cabin cruiser from South Slough on the south coast and \$150,000 to remove a float home drifting down the Multnomah Channel in Portland. The largest recent project, removal of the former military vessels Sakarissa and Alert from the Columbia River in Portland, cost more than \$4 million, with Metro contributing \$2 million. The U.S. Coast Guard spent an additional \$2.3 million to raise the sunken vessels and remove oil.

“When irresponsible owners abandon vessels in waterways, our schoolkids pay the price,” said DSL Director Vicki L. Walker.

\$18.8 Million Proposed for Vessel Removals

The 2023-25 Governor’s Recommended Budget for DSL includes \$18.8 million to remove ADVs accumulated in public waterways. Removing those vessels will address current hazards and risks, with the ADV Program Workgroup simultaneously seeking long-term solutions.

The ADV Program Workgroup will explore all elements of a statewide ADV program, with work culminating in a report to the State Land Board no later than April 2024. The report would include a program framework addressing prevention, response, enforcement, education and outreach, and potential long-term funding needs and sources, as well as recommendations for legislative action in the 2025 Legislative Session.

Walker said DSL will immediately convene the ADV Program Workgroup, which is anticipated to include stakeholders with varying perspectives, interests, and expertise, such as local governments, ports, marinas, waterway user groups, environmental organizations, vessel insurance, vessel salvage, and public safety, as well as relevant federal agencies, other coastal states, and Oregon state agencies.

“Working with partners and stakeholders has been essential to our ADV efforts thus far,” Walker said. “Continued collaboration will be critical to the success of the ADV Program Workgroup and, ultimately, to implementation of Oregon’s statewide ADV program.”

About the State Land Board and the Department of State Lands: The State Land Board consists of Governor Tina Kotek, Secretary of State Shemia Fagan and State Treasurer Tobias Read. Established by the Oregon Constitution in 1859, the Land Board oversees the state’s Common School Fund. The Department of State Lands is the Land Board’s administrative agency, managing the lands and resources that help fund Oregon’s public schools and protecting the state’s waterways and wetlands for the many benefits they provide.

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Photos of the deconstruction of the vessels Sakarissa and Alert are [available for download here](#).